

FACEBOOK HELPS ADVERTISERS DISTINGUISH GAY USERS



A new study from Microsoft Research India and Max Planck Institute for Software Systems, is sending out some waves concerning Facebook privacy issues; specifically, issues with revealing users sexual preference to advertisers. The study reveals some surprising information about how gay male users may inadvertently reveal their sexual identity. The report found that advertisers were targeting ads exclusively at gay men. That, in itself, is of no shock value, until one finds out that many of these ads are not intrinsically homosexual. As opposed to the ad being for a gay bar, or anything related to a specific sexual preference, many of the ads were not. One of the ads found to be targeting homosexual male users was for a nursing degree at a medical college in Florida. Thus, when the users mentioned to the college that they had seen the ad on Facebook, the advertiser, or the college, would know that user's sexual preference. According to the researchers, "The danger with such ads, unlike the gay bar ad where the target demographic is blatantly obvious, is that the user reading the ad text would have no idea that by clicking it he would reveal to the advertiser both his sexual-preference and a unique identifier." A unique identifier could consist of an IP address, cookie, or even an email address, which would be gathered once the user signed up on the advertisers site. "Furthermore," said the researchers. "Such deceptive ads are not uncommon; indeed exactly half of the 66 ads shown exclusively to gay men (more than 50 times) during our experiment did not mention 'gay' anywhere in the ad text."

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